

Hurst Green

2nd Jun 19

Ezra 3:7-13

Laying again the foundations

We have been admiring the commitment to worship, service and giving that these people needed to come back over 1000 miles of desert and dedicate themselves to rebuilding the temple. The example that sets to us particularly making worship our number one priority in life rather than something we turn up for on Sunday.

Last week we looked at doing new things with God and how those must focus primarily on God but also on the bible and building God's house and to do so will require courage and unity.

And of course we understand that God's house is his people; we are the temple of God and the building is just where we come together to bring our worship together. And so in building God's house we are discipling one another and so fulfilling the Great Commandment to make disciples of all nations.

And so we return to the book of Ezra and the second half of chapter 3. In the seventh month of the first year they built that ginormous altar the size of the length of this building square and the width of this building high so that they could carry out the appointed acts of worship.

Now they set about the building of the temple and in our reading today we have heard of the organisation and the laying of the foundations.

Now all of this happens in 535 BC and the temple is the same size as Solomon's magnificent temple. 60 cubits long, 30 wide and 15 high, that is 600 feet by 300 feet by 150 feet or 27m by 13 ½ m by 7m. All built without the advantage of machinery and completed in seven years.

The phrase the laying of foundations is not something that is being done from scratch but the foundations lay under the debris of the demolition of Solomon's temple which will have included fire and then 70 years of waste and neglect. Think what your garden looks like if you neglect it for one year – this was 70! Nature tends to reclaim the land and is very affective at it.

But now elaborate preparations were needed to get everything ready because they could not start until they had things ready.

They brought cedar from Lebanon – no mean feat. The phrase can trip off the tongue while hiding the magnitude of this task. The cedars were huge trees – they needed to be because the temple was going to be huge. These trees were cut down on the hills of Lebanon and prepared. They were then brought down to the sea without the aid of engines and cranes. They were floated down to Israel and then brought overland to Jerusalem.

In the meantime the work began in Jerusalem. Levites were appointed to oversee the work and the skilled tradesmen employed.

The temple mount needed clearing, stones salvaging and new ones cutting – they were getting on with their commitment – turning it into reality. An ordered reality – a reality with an aim.

They cleared the site and the builders set too on the foundations – The temple would need strong foundations but those that Solomon had laid would still be there.

Today much archaeology works off the foundations of old buildings. When demolished the materials tend to get used elsewhere or get removed from the site but the foundations are left and get buried for archaeologists to find later.

So these people expose the foundations and carryout any repairs that are needed until we get to the point sometime after the second month and before the end of the year when the foundations are laid!

And they pause for a celebration. When we build we tend to celebrate when the roof is complete and when the building is complete but these people know that their priority is to worship God and so they get out the finery and take their places for a great celebration which is covered in one verse:

Ezra 3:11 (ANIV)

¹¹ with praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures for ever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

With praise and thanksgiving – this is not just singing a song or two – this is heartfelt. They may have done the work but they knew who deserved the praise for making it all happen. Their God!

The same God that the heathen King Cyrus had called “The Lord, the God of Heaven”.

This was Gods doing and he was going to be praised for it!

And this was not just for the priests to get on with “All the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord”.

This is why week by week I encourage every one of you to get **involved in our worship** here. We are all here to worship God and that does not mean just singing the songs and then going into passive mode and listening to others. We should all be involved and God speaks to and through each and every one of you.

Remember 1 Cor 14 when it speaks of orderly worship?

1 Corinthians 14:26 (ANIV)

*²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.*

It is not just for a few, or just those that feel like it – it is for every one of you. In not getting involved and speaking out you are not only depriving yourself but you are also depriving everyone else. All of this is for the strengthening of the Church – it is for discipling, it is for the building up of the temple which is why we are looking at Ezra.

If, initially, you do not feel up to just praying out loud then before you come look up a prayer, a psalm or a reading and use that.

But you need to build one another up and being silent is denying your friends the chance to be built up as well as denying yourself.

And as you are built up then you will become bolder

This week read 1 Corinthians 14 and consider all that it says. Spend a few minutes each day considering it

There is much else in 1 Corinthians on the subject but this chapter is straightforward and you have all wisdom through your Father God and so it is easily understood and if you find it difficult find someone to talk to.

Remember in verse 13 of our reading that the people made so much noise.

But earlier in verse 12 it says

Ezra 3:12 (ANIV)

¹² *But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, ~~while many others shouted for joy.~~*

Now the received wisdom is that all of these elderly people were weeping because they had seen the glory of the temple of Solomon and knew that this new temple would not be as magnificent.

It would not be as magnificent because despite the millions in gold and silver they had brought back Israel was not as wealthy as it had been in the time of Solomon and so the received wisdom may be right.

But they could also be weeping because having seen the temple, having seen the desolation they came back to they are now seeing the temple rise again. The tears can be for joy as well as sorrow!

But together the people made a great noise “*And the sound was heard far away.*”

They may have been in fear of the people around (remember verse 3) but they were committed to worship and they were prepared to be seen to be worshipping.

So these refugees from so long ago continue to teach us lessons for today.

We already know that worship should be our number one priority as 1 Thess 8 reminds us

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *Be joyful always;* ¹⁷ *pray continually;* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Just as it was theirs and we have seen that we should all be involved in worship – it is not just for the few.

Just as these refugees made their commitment a reality in doing the job they had come to do and started building the temple so we need to **make our commitment to God a reality.**

That involves all of us being involved in discipling the nations or at least this part of this nation where God has put us. It is all about growth and as I said in one of the earlier talks this should be producing evidence in your life. The fruits of the spirit should be growing on us and we should be growing in the characteristics of being a Christian that will stop us being unproductive. (See 1 Peter 1:5-9 for more homework)

Our Praise to God needs to be continuous and not just at the end (and not just at key milestones). 1 Thessalonians showed us that just now. This is not just when it is convenient, when we have time or once a week on a Sunday. Are we giving thanks in everything so that we uplift ourselves, make ourselves more cheerful, make the world a better place and witness to our God?

Just as they laid the foundations of the temple so **our temple needs to have strong foundations.**

What are our foundations – the basic Christian teachings of salvation by grace and forgiveness of sins and faith?

Hebrews 11:1 (ANIV)

¹ *now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

And

Hebrews 11:3 (ANIV)

³ *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

These foundations need to be in our life – strong and certain so that we build our house on the rock of Christ and not on the shifting sand of the world and its belief systems.

But

Hebrews 6:1-2 (ANIV)

¹ *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*

It is too easy to stay with the basics of our faith relaying the same foundations but we are told **not lay again these foundations.**

We have them rock solid and firm in our lives but have you noticed with a building that no-one notices the foundations?

They are there in the earth and have to be built right or the building is in danger but no one sees them.

What people see is the building put on top of them. The building that is the temple of the Lord – that is you and Christ in your life. They see those fruits of the spirit and characteristics of a Christian that will make them want to know why you are different; that will draw them to Christ.

You in the meantime must continue to grow in Christ. Our faith is not about being given salvation and standing still but it is about moving on and knowing more of your God.

That is why we have this slot each Sunday, it is why we have mid-week groups and it is why you should study and meditate on the word of God (remember your homework from earlier!).

Standing still is not an option; you either grow more like Christ or you drift away from him.

Romans 8:29 tells us that God has created us to be conformed into the image of Christ and 2 Cor 3:18 says that we are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory.

But, like Paul, I am confident

Philippians 1:6 (ANIV)

⁶ ~~being confident of this, that~~ he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

But note that “*Carry it on*” because that shows it is not a one off but a matter of continual growth. That is discipling!

And so these refugees have shown us more about worshiping God and our Christian lives.

- Worship is something we should all be actively involved in.
- We need to make our commitment to God a reality.
- Our praise of God needs to be continuous.
- Our temple foundations need to be strong
- And we do not lay again the foundations but we get on with the building – we become more Christ like in all we do.